

# **Maine Academy of Natural Sciences**

## **Renewal Recommendation Report 2016**

Review Team: John Bird, Chair, Jana Lapoint and Nichi Farnham

November 6, 2016

### Background:

On June 30, 2016 the Maine Charter School Commission, acting in accord with Chapter 3: Procedures for Charter School Renewal, issued to Maine Academy of Natural Sciences a performance report of the school's performance during its first four years of its initial charter, and gave the school the opportunity to respond regarding factual inaccuracies within the report. Also issued to the school was the Renewal Guidance to begin the renewal process.

On July 14, 2016 the Maine Charter School Commission issued to Maine Academy of Natural Sciences the Charter Renewal Application. The application described the application process and the rubrics which were to be applied. Maine Academy of Natural Sciences submitted its renewal application prior to the September 30, 2016 due date and was reviewed by the Review Team and relevant members of Maine Department of Education for special education and budgetary reviews. On October 14, 2016 the Maine Charter School Commission's Review Team for Maine Academy of Natural Sciences completed a site visit with administration and governing board members. On October 18, 2016 a public hearing was held at Maine Academy of Natural Sciences with community members, parents and students addressing the Review Team regarding the school's performance over the past four years.

According to Section 5: Criteria, the review included "academic performance, fiscal performance, governance, effective leadership, instructional quality, compliance with terms of the charter contract and applicable laws and regulations, mission fulfillment with consideration also of parent and community support and significant positive or negative trends in performance, operation, and/or governance."

The Commission must rule on the renewal no later than 45 days after receiving the application.

Recommendation:

Today on November 8, 2016 the Review Team is bringing forth a recommendation to renew the Maine Academy of Natural Sciences K-8 program for a period of 5 years. In making this decision the Review Team has answered the essential question, *“Do you believe that the applicant has achieved the standards and targets stated in the charter contract, is organizationally and fiscally viable, and has been faithful to the terms of the contract and applicable laws?”*

MeANS continues to fulfill its mission in serving a non-traditional student population in need of support while focusing on themes of agriculture, forestry, and sustainability. The school offers project-based experiences with hands-on learning and each student has his/her own learning plan. Both MeANS families and community representatives have consistently spoken positively of the program’s value over the years. The strengthened relationship with Kennebec Valley Community College, which includes the availability of concurrent enrollment courses and dual enrollment courses, provides a great opportunity for MEANS students. MeANS met the academic targets of the state-and school-developed assessments in several areas in its first four years.

MeANS is working on a three-year financial plan to be financially independent from Good Will Hinckley (GWH) in operating the school. In the renewal application it was mentioned that beginning in the fall of 2016 the President/Director of Development for GWH will work closely with the MEANS Board of Directors and Academy faculty on the implementation of a comprehensive and ongoing fundraising and development campaign with twin goals of increasing financial independence and expanding resources for instructional activities. There is a solid working relationship between Good Will Hinckley and MeANS staff and board leadership.

The MeANS administration and faculty are acting on strengthening programs, procedures and practices to improve the organizational culture, effectiveness and morale. The plan to gradually diminish the director of curriculum’s role at MeANS is on target. The governing board functions effectively – e.g., regular meetings, and functioning standing committees. The school’s board member profile has strengthened over the years and now adds up to an impressively varied skill set.

# Maine Charter School Commission

## Reviewer's Evaluation for a Public Charter School Renewal Application

### Applicant: MeANS

This rubric is intended to assist review team members in analyzing applications for charter school renewal.

- This analysis occurs after the application has been verified to be complete.
- This rubric will be used by team members to aid in his/her recommendation to the full Commission.
- This rubric is organized similarly to the renewal application and its topical sections.
- Members will review each subsection against various criteria provided in the rubric.
- Based on those criteria, the member will rate the subsection as being inadequate, minimally developed, fully developed, or excellent.
- Each member shall document his/her respective determinations with respect to his/her rating of the subsection.

Inadequate. The reviewer has found that this section of the application lacks detail or raises serious concerns about the applicant's ability to maintain that aspect of a successful, sustainable, high-quality charter school.

Minimally Developed. This section lacks meaningful detail or provides only superficial information. It does not create confidence in the success of the applicant to maintain that aspect of a successful, sustainable, high-quality charter school.

Fully Developed. This section evidences detailed preparation of the application and addresses key issues fully. It provides strong indication that the applicant can successfully maintain that aspect of a successful, sustainable, high-quality charter school.

Excellent. This section evidences a comprehensive understanding and readiness to address the key issues and provides superior detail supporting that aspect of a successful, sustainable, high-quality charter school.

- After all sections are reviewed by each member, the review team will convene to discuss the application and formulate its recommendation to the full Commission.
- The rubric documents may be subsequently referred to by members of the Commission in considering subsequent actions on the application.
- All notes taken on or in conjunction with the rubric, including those on this worksheet constitute a working paper of the Commission and must be preserved in the application file as required by law.
- Members should preserve notes and the rubric during consideration of an application and provide them to commission staff for the application file when no longer needed.

**Looking Back A. Academic Performance**

*Strengths*

- MeANS (Maine Academy of Natural Sciences) continues to fulfill its mission in serving a non-traditional student population in need of support while focusing on themes of agriculture, forestry, and sustainability. The school offers project-based experiences with hands-on learning with each student having his/her own learning plan.
- The school’s advisory system is a key element that connects the students, parents, and the school - all focused on the student’s individual success and the student led conferences are confidence builders for the students and parents.
- The strengthened relationship with Kennebec Valley Community College, which includes the availability of concurrent enrollment courses and dual enrollment courses, provides a great opportunity for MeANS students and there has been growth in number of students and courses taken at Kennebec Valley Community College. MeANS students having a high success rate in completing those courses.
- MeANS met the academic targets of the state-and school-developed assessments in several areas all four years.
- MeANS maintains a high graduation rate.
- The school worked effectively with an unexpectedly high percentage of incoming freshmen with IEP’s (Individual Education Plan) in 2015-16.
- MeANS has settled on assessment instruments that enable the school to develop sustained ways to measure academic progress for the student population served.
- Student teacher interns from Unity College, Colby College, and Bates College are teaching and learning from MeANS students and teachers.

*Questions, Concerns*

- MeANS is looking for the right balance between learning in the classroom and hands-on, experiential learning with agriculture, forestry and sustainability themes.
- Overall targets in academic proficiency only partially met in two of the four years, including 2015-16.
- Overall targets in academic growth only partially met in three of the four years, including 2015-16.
- MeANS will continue to learn from the cultural disruption that occurred in 2015-16 with the entrance of a large group of incoming freshmen and have a plan in place to address the issue.
- The school should sustain efforts to develop strategies to support the school’s significantly larger enrollment – e.g., older students mentoring the younger students, etc.
- MeANS must follow through on plans for mainstreaming instruction for students with special needs and the blending of agriculture and forestry with the academic courses.
- The use of the proficiency-based system requires the school to continue to have clear record keeping. The Empower software tool helps with documentation. It is critical that the school continue being clear with the students about what is required to meet standards and targets in order to graduate.
- The “stress” of cranking out more than double the intensive units (3 to 7) requires more from staff and students. This was an effort to reconnect with the mission. The test would be whether the intensives address the mission and blend with the overall program.

Address the overall section. These notes may be used at the public hearing to address concerns.

Rate: ( )Inadequate ( )Minimally Developed ( **X** )Fully Developed ( )Excellent

**Looking Back B. Financial Performance and Business Services**

*Strengths*

- MeANS is working on a three-year financial plan to be financially independent from Good Will Hinckley (GWH) in operating the school (the facilities would be the only part of the school that would be granted from GWH). In the renewal application it was mentioned that beginning in the fall of 2016 the President/Director of Development for GWH will work closely with the MEANS Board of Directors and Academy faculty on the implementation of a comprehensive and ongoing fundraising and development campaign with twin goals of increasing financial independence and expanding resources for instructional activities.
- The solid working relationship between Good Will Hinckley and MeANS staff and board leadership. The new GWH president seems to be off to a solid start in this regard. The MeANS relationship with the Good Will Hinckley (GWH) board continues to become more defined.
- MeANS has access to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fund to provide a robust program of activities for after-school and evening for residential students.
- MeANS has been provided with an impressively renovated \$7 m classroom building that was a vast improvement over the previous, undersized and inadequate facility.
- MeANS is developing several community partnerships that provide educational benefits to the students and cost savings to the school.

*Questions, Concerns*

- The firming up of the three-year financial plan to be operationally independent from GWH as MeANS is currently configured - and without a need for the operational financial support of GWH. The governing board does not seem to be fully informed about the three-year financial plan
- There is no plan in place to assure that the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fund will be replaced when it expires.
- MeANS should continue to expand fund development initiatives that that supplement and are in conjunction with GWH fundraising efforts.
- The insistence on the need for continual growth in student numbers for financial stability is a bit concerning. There must be other ways to gain financial stability. Adding more students makes it tougher to maintain small class sizes while keeping a focus on the school's mission and climate.
- The school has consistently enrolled students requiring specially designed instruction, and who benefit from a small student teacher ratio. MeANS need to have plans to address the financial implications of this.

Address the overall section. These notes may be used at the public hearing to address concerns.

Rate: ( ) Inadequate ( ) Minimally Developed ( **X** ) Fully Developed ( ) Excellent

**Looking Back C. Organizational Performance**

*Strengths*

- The principal is off to a much stronger start in her second year as school leader. The principal "*is supportive and supported.*"
- A small and strong core staff has been with the school since it opened.
- The administration and faculty are acting on strengthening programs, procedures and practices to improve the organizational culture, effectiveness and morale – e.g., teacher leadership teams.
- The plan to gradually diminish the director of curriculum's role at MeANS is on target.

- The board functions effectively – e.g., regular meetings, and functioning standing committees (including a very strong academic affairs committee). The board member profile has strengthened over the years and now adds up to an impressively varied skill set; the board is led by a highly respected educator.
- The board is addressing the issue of relatively low faculty compensation compared with other public schools.
- There has been a waiting list of potential students each of the five years the school has been open.
- Teacher involvement in leadership decisions and discussions has been beneficial to the improvement of the school.

*Questions, Concerns*

- Continue efforts to strengthen faculty morale, cohesion and overall effectiveness.
- Continue efforts to strengthen the overall culture of the school.
- Keep the goal of improving faculty compensation a top board priority.
- Continue efforts to strengthen the board and administrative relationship between GWH and MeANS.
- Knowing and understanding the legal parameters of the educational technician III (ed. tech.) positions is being addressed. When used properly these positions are a great complement to strong teachers.

Address the overall section. These notes may be used at the public hearing to address concerns.

Rate: ( ) Inadequate ( ) Minimally Developed ( **X** ) **Fully Developed** ( ) Excellent

**Looking to the Future**

**A. Adjustments to the Performance Framework, if any**

Performance Framework

Proposed change in application	Evaluator notes regarding proposed change
None	n/a

**Looking to the Future - Adjustments to the Performance Framework**

*Strengths*

N/A

*Questions, Concerns*

N/A

Rate: ( ) Inadequate ( ) Minimally Developed ( **X** ) **Fully Developed** ( ) Excellent

**Looking to the Future – Educational Plan**

**B. As applicable, review proposed improvements to the charter school as it relates to:**

Education Plan – Proposed changes	Evaluator notes regarding proposed change
A Mission, vision, identification of targeted student population and the community the school hopes to serve	
B Academic Program	
C Special Student Populations	
D Assessment	
E School Climate and Discipline	

**Looking to the Future - review proposed improvements to the charter school**

<p><i>Strengths</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversifying program and scheduling offerings/options to reinvigorate the mission and overall program – e.g., intensives, KVCC, Career and Technical Education (CTE), online options, etc.</li> <li>• Experiential learning opportunities – e.g., students attending the Camden Conference</li> <li>• More professional development opportunities</li> <li>• Mainstreaming special needs students</li> <li>• Adding expertise to handle bullying and other disruptive behavior</li> </ul>
<p>Questions, Concerns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep the strengthening of programs and scheduling options to align mission and program as a top priority.</li> <li>• Look for creative options for the use of the GWH campus to address the issues of growth, program diversification and mission integrity.</li> </ul>

Rate: ( ) Inadequate ( ) Minimally Developed ( **X** ) Fully Developed ( ) Excellent

**Looking to the Future - Education Plan Analysis Summary**

<p><i>Is the Education Plan adequate and appropriate? Are we convinced that the applicant makes a strong case for the quality of the program? Describe why or why not?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes - provided the school executes the initiatives described in both its renewal application and throughout the renewal review process.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Does the education Plan support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes. The plans on paper align well with the vision and mission, with additional initiatives being considered that also appear to meet the same alignment test.</li> </ul>

**Looking to the Future – Organizational Plan**

**As applicable, review proposed improvements to the charter school as it relates to:**

Organizational Plan – proposed changes	Evaluator notes regarding proposed change
A School Calendar and Daily Schedule	
B Student Recruitment and Enrollment	
C Staffing and Human Resources	
D Management and Operation	
E Parent and Community Development	

**Looking to the Future - Organizational Plan**

*Strengths*

- The new GWH president is off to a strong start; he brings school system leadership experience credentials as well as a commitment to lead the fund-raising effort for the overall GWH enterprise.
- The leadership seems to have learned from the issues confronted in moving to the new facility, judging from the changes initiated for Year 5 and contemplated for the second contract cycle.
- Despite some staff turnover, the school and GWH continue to have a core group of top-notch veterans who fully understand and enthusiastically embrace the school’s mission and vision.

*Questions, Concerns*

- Question and concerns cited in the “Looking Back” section of this rubric apply here:
  - Continue efforts to strengthen faculty morale, cohesion and overall effectiveness.
  - Continue efforts to strengthen the overall culture of the school.
  - Keep the goal of improving faculty compensation a board priority.
  - Continue efforts to strengthen the board and administrative relationship between GWH and MeANS

Rate: ( ) Inadequate ( ) Minimally Developed ( **X** ) Fully Developed ( ) Excellent

**Looking to the Future - Organizational Plan Analysis Summary**

*Is the Organizational Plan adequate and appropriate? Are we convinced that the applicant makes a strong case for the quality of the program? Describe why or why not?*

- Yes. The organizational plan as described in the renewal application is appropriate. As always, execution depends on the quality of the people engaged in the process of operating the school. Given the school’s veteran staff, there is cause for optimism, despite the reality that the director of curriculum’s departure means the loss of the guiding spirit and a major architect of the school’s culture and program in its formative years.

*Does the Organizational Plan support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not?*

- Yes, but the same sentiments expressed above apply here.

### Looking to the Future – Governance Plan

As applicable, review proposed improvements to the charter school as it relates to:

Governance Plan – proposed changes	Evaluator notes regarding proposed change
A Governing Body	
B Governing Board Composition	

#### *Strengths*

- The board functions effectively – e.g., regular meetings, functioning standing committees, including a very strong academic affairs committee.
- Board member profile has strengthened over the years and now adds up to an impressively varied skill set; the board is currently led by a highly respected educator.

#### *Questions, Concerns*

- Occasional communication glitches between the board and administration
- Continue efforts to strengthen the board and administrative relationship between GWH and MeANS .

Rate: ( ) Inadequate ( ) Minimally Developed ( **X** ) Fully Developed ( ) Excellent

### Looking to the Future - Governance Plan Analysis Summary

*Is the Governance Plan adequate and appropriate? Are we convinced that the applicant makes a strong case for the quality of the program? Describe why or why not?*

Yes. The governance plan as described in the renewal application is appropriate. As always, execution depends on the quality of the people engaged in the process of governing the school. Given the board's overall performance to date, there is cause for optimism.

*Does the Governance Plan support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not?*

Yes, but the same sentiments expressed above apply here.

**Looking to the Future – Business and Financial Services**

**As applicable, review proposed improvements to the charter school as it relates to:**

Business and Financial Services – proposed changes	Evaluator notes regarding proposed change
A Budget	
B Financial Management	
C Facilities	
D Transportation	
E Insurance	
F Food Service	
G Closure Protocol	

**Looking to the Future - Business and Financial Services**

*Strengths*

- Working on a three-year financial plan to be financially independent from Good Will Hinckley (GWH) in operating the school (the facilities would be the only part of the school that would be granted from GWH).
- The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fund to provide a robust program of activities for after-school and evening for residential students.
- The solid working relationship between Good Will Hinckley and MeANS staff and board leadership.
- Successful opening of an impressively renovated \$7 m classroom building.
- MeANS has developed several community partnerships that provided educational benefits to the students and cost savings to the school.
- The new GWH president’s expanded role in fund development and in promoting full use of the GWH campus to accommodate the school’s growth.

*Questions, Concerns*

Questions and concerns cited in the “Looking Back” section of this report apply here.

- Fulfilling the three-year financial plan to be operationally independent from GWH as MeANS is currently configured.
- There is no plan in place to assure that the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Grant will be replaced when it expires.
- Raising the funds needed to secure MeANS’ long-term future both separately from and in coordination with GWH’s efforts.

Rate: ( ) Inadequate ( ) Minimally Developed ( **X** ) Fully Developed ( ) Excellent

**Looking to the Future - Business and Financial Services Analysis Summary**

*Are the Business and Financial Services adequate and appropriate? Are we convinced that the applicant makes a strong case for the quality of the program? Describe why or why not?*

Yes. The business and financial services plan as described in the renewal application is appropriate. As always, execution depends on the quality of the people operating the school. Given the school’s progress to date in building a solid financial foundation, there is cause for optimism.

*Do the Business and Financial Services support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not?*

Yes. GWH is committed to raising funds and providing use of the overall campus to fulfill MeANS’ mission and vision.

**Looking to the Future**

**As applicable, review proposed improvements to the charter school as it relates to:**

Education Service Providers – proposed changes	Evaluator notes regarding proposed change
None	N/A

**Looking to the Future - Education Service Providers**

Strengths
N/A
Questions, Concerns
N/A

Rate: ( ) Inadequate ( ) Minimally Developed ( ) Fully Developed ( ) Excellent

**Looking to the Future - Education Service Provider Analysis Summary**

*Are the Education Service Provider Services adequate and appropriate? Are we convinced that the applicant makes a strong case for the quality of the program? Describe why or why not?*

N/A

*Do the Education Service Provider Services support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not?*

N/A

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION**

*Do you believe that the applicant has achieved the standards and targets stated in the charter contract, is organizationally and fiscally viable, and has been faithful to the terms of the contract and applicable laws? Describe why or why not.*

Yes, in sufficient fashion to warrant renewing the charter with a five-year contract. Where the need for improvement has been cited in this report, we are optimistic that the school will respond favorably based on progress over the last four plus years.

Overall Assessment: After a thorough analysis of a comprehensive body of objective evidence defined by the Performance Framework in the charter contract the recommendation for renewal of the charter is:

**To renew**                    ( X )

To not renew                (   )